

Remarks to the United Nations High-Level Debate on Interfaith Dialogue in New York City

November 13, 2008

Mr. Secretary-General, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen: Laura and I are pleased to be back here at the United Nations, and I am grateful for the opportunity to once again address the General Assembly.

I want to thank King Abdallah of Saudi Arabia for his leadership and for convincing us all to come together to speak about faith. I appreciate the participants who recognize the transformative and uplifting power of faith.

One of my core beliefs is that there is an Almighty God and that every man, woman, and child on the face of this Earth bears His image. Many years ago, faith changed my life. Faith has sustained me through the challenges and the joys of my Presidency, and faith will guide me for the rest of my days.

I know many of the leaders gathered in this assembly have been influenced by faith as well. We may profess different creeds and worship in different places, but our faith leads us to common values. We believe God calls us to love our neighbors and to treat one another with compassion and respect. We believe God calls us to honor the dignity of all life and to speak against cruelty and injustice. We believe God calls us to live in peace and to oppose all those who use His name to justify violence and murder.

Freedom is God's gift to every man, woman, and child. And that freedom includes the right of all people to worship as they see fit. Sixty years ago, members of the United Nations General Assembly acknowledged this truth when we adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The declaration proclaims that everyone has the right to choose or change religions and the right to worship in private or in public.

The United States strongly supported the adoption of the Universal Declaration. In fact, the American delegation was led by a former First Lady, Eleanor Roosevelt. When we voted for the Universal Declaration, the American people reaffirmed a conviction that dates back to our earliest days. Our Nation

was founded by people seeking haven from religious persecution. The first amendment of our Constitution guarantees the free exercise of religion for all. And through the generations, our Nation has helped defend the religious liberty of others, from liberating the concentration camps of Europe to protecting Muslims in places like Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Iraq.

Today, the United States is carrying on that noble tradition by making religious liberty a central element of our foreign policy. We've established a Commission on the International Religious Freedom to monitor the state of religious liberty worldwide. We strongly encourage nations to understand that religious freedom is the foundation of a healthy and hopeful society. We're not afraid to stand with religious dissidents and believers who practice their faith, even where it is unwelcome.

One of the best ways to safeguard religious freedom is to aid the rise of democracy. Democratic governments don't all look alike. Each reflects the history and traditions of its own people. But one way—but one of the defining features of any democracy is that it makes room for people of all backgrounds and all faiths. Democracies allow people with diverse views to discuss their differences and live in harmony.

The expansion of democracy also represents the most promising path to peace. People who are free to express their opinions can challenge the ideologies of hate. They can defend their religious beliefs and speak out against those seeking to twist them to evil ends. They can prevent their children from falling under the sway of extremists by giving them a more hopeful alternative.

Over the past 8 years, I've been privileged to see how freedom and faith can lift up lives and lead the world toward peace. I remember clearly a congregation in the State of Kansas, in my country, whose members stayed together and prayed together, even when a tornado had torn down their church. I've seen faithful caregivers on the continent of Africa who take AIDS patients given up for dead and restore them to health. I have seen mothers across the Middle East whose faith leads them to dream of a better and more peaceful future for their children, a

dream shared by mothers all around the world.

I appreciate every nation participating in today's dialog. Through dialog we can draw closer to the day when our prayers for freedom and peace are answered, and every person on Earth enjoys the rights and dignity granted by an Almighty God.

God bless.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11 a.m. in the General Assembly Hall at the United Nations Headquarters. In his remarks, he referred to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon of the United Nations. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

Remarks to the Manhattan Institute in New York City

November 13, 2008

Thank you very much. Please be seated. Thank you, Larry, thank you for the introduction. Thank you for giving Laura and me a chance to come to this historic hall to talk about a big issue facing the world. And today I appreciate you giving me a chance to come and for me to outline the steps that America and our partners are taking and are going to take to overcome this financial crisis.

And I thank the Manhattan Institute for all you have done. I appreciate the fact that I am here in a fabulous city to give this speech. People say, "Are you confident about our future?" And the answer is, absolutely. And it's easy to be confident when you're in a city like New York City. After all, there is an unbelievable spirit in this city. This is the city whose skyline has offered immigrants their first glimpse of freedom. This is the city where people rallied when that freedom came under attack. This is the city whose capital markets have attracted investments from around the world and financed the dreams of entrepreneurs all across America. This is the city that has been and will always be the financial capital of the world.

And I am grateful to be in the presence of two men who served ably and nobly New York City, Mayor Koch and Mayor Giuliani. Thank you all for coming. Glad you're here. I thank the Manhattan Institute board of trustees and its chairman, Paul Singer, for

doing good work, being a good policy center. And before I begin, I must say, I would hope that Ray Kelly would tell New York's finest how much I appreciate the incredible hospitality that we are always shown here in New York City. You're the head of a fabulous police force, and we thank you very much, sir.

We live in a world in which our economies are interconnected. Prosperity and progress have reached farther than any time in our history. Unfortunately, as we have seen in recent months, financial turmoil anywhere in the world affects economies everywhere in the world. And so this weekend I'm going to host a summit on financial markets and the world economy with leaders from developed and developing nations that account for nearly 90 percent of the world economy. Leaders of the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the United Nations, and the Financial Stability Forum are going to be there as well. We'll have dinner at the White House tomorrow night, and we'll meet most of the day on Saturday.

The leaders attending this weekend's meeting agree on a clear purpose: to address the current crisis and to lay the foundation for reforms that will help prevent a similar crisis in the future. We also agree that this undertaking is too large to be accomplished in a single session. The issues are too complex, the problem is too significant to try to solve or to come up with reasonable recommendations in just one meeting. So this summit will be the first of a series of meetings.

It will focus on five key objectives: understanding the causes of the global crisis; reviewing the effectiveness of our responses thus far; developing principles for reforming our financial and regulatory systems; launching a specific action plan to implement those principles; and reaffirming our conviction that free market principles offer the surest path to lasting prosperity.

First, we're working toward a common understanding of the causes behind the global crisis. Different countries will naturally bring different perspectives, but there are some points on which we can all agree.

Over the past decade, the world experienced a period of strong economic growth.